DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 193 661 CS 205 928

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TITLE Navajo World View Harmony in Directives for English Texts.
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 35p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee Linguistics Symposium (9th, Milwaukee, WI, March 7-8, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indian Education; Bilingual Education; *Cultural Differences; Educational Needs; English (Second Language); English Instruction; Higher Education; *Language Research; Linguistics; *Multicultural Education; *Navajo; *Writing (Composition); Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

An examination of 13 selected samples of the English compositions written by Navajo college students revealed much of interest for the developing concern over widespread classification of native Americans as failure-bound in college courses involving written English skills. Four culturally motivated text strategies were found to be typical and regularly relied upon by the students within speech act expectations and discourse patterning of units larger than the sentence. The four strategies, related to specific cultural norms, were described and exemplified in the following areas of investigation: (1) speaker/hearer role requirements, (2) implosive directional focus tendencies, (3) verbal and temporal reference disparity, and (4) repetition of information. The most preferable way to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between Navajo and English was considered to be the utilization of a bilingual-multilingual native language approach in teaching. Until such courses become available to large numbers of native American students, college instructors with Navajo students should become aware of the responsibilities and problems associated with teaching such students. (Author/FL)

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ED193661

Navajo world view harmony in directives for English texts

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abstract

The study of selected samples of Navajo college student English compositions reveals much of interest for the developing concern over widespread classification of Native Americans as failure bound in college courses involving written English skills. Four culturally motivated text strategies are seen to be typical and regularly relied upon by the Navajo within speech act expectations and discourse patterning of units larger than the sentence. These four strategies relate to specific cultural norms, described and exemplified in the following areas of investigation: 1) speaker/hearer role requirements 2) implosive directional focus tendencies 3) verbal and temporal reference disparity 4) repetition of information. The Navajo cultural notion of harmony according to Witherspoon (1977) is discussed and directed toward the proposal that ESL considerations be utilized to a greater degree in the instruction of Navajo college students, especially those for whom English is a second language and Anglo is a second culture.

The organization of written English text by Navajo college students is of interest to diverse disciplines. To the sociologist, the way Navajos as a community are resisting in a conscious manner total cultural assimilation

into the Anglo social structure is topical. For the linguist, the nature of Athapaskan language characteristics as they may be affecting the use of second language or second dialect systems is of relevance. Educators too, gain much information in such study applicable to changes needed in teaching methodology for the instruction of Native Americans. Indeed, many educators have recently shown interest in new attitudes concerning what is conveniently termed error analysis. By investigation of some of the characteristics of the Navajo language and certain of the culture's conceptual appropriations within the convention of Navajo world view, interesting cross-linguistic and cross-cultural influences may be compared to written English usages, projecting partial explanations for Navajo-English student writing problems and text composition strategy.[1]

The data for this study were obtained from the freshman composition files and the Writing Clinic files at Arizona State University. Files were selected from the academic year 1978-79. Almost all students in freshmen composition have great stylistic problems associated with distinguishing and utilizing analytical types of expository writing. For this reason, data was selected according to inherent descriptive or narrative qualities of compositions.

One hundred and twenty samples were reviewed, from which a base of thirteen were selected as appropriately narration or description. The data provides preliminary evidence for hypothesizing the Navajo's use of non-Anglo writing strategies in writing for college course work.

One possible strategy for discourse involves the employment of writer and reader roles and expectations concerning those roles. Ralph Cooley (1979) in a study of the public speaking standards of three Plains Amerindian tribes, indicates that certain speech act related constraints operate within a rhetorical model structured in ways unfamiliar to the Anglo way of thinking. It is his contention, that in Native American culture, speakers and listeners divide communicative responsibilities as follows: speakers are required only to show evidence of sufficient general and/or specific knowledge of the subject at hand; listeners are required to connect and evaluate any information given by the speaker. Our data strongly supports the validity of a model utilizing this division. In narration, Navajo student writers appear to be following the role expectations Cooley outlines. One indication of this is the way writers digress from a general topic in order to indicate that they possess 'expertise' in a tertiary concern. For an example

of this see appendix, data sample #2 lines 18-20 where the writer diverges from a general descriptive overview to provide the reader with some specific information on the nature of basketball. Incidence of this is fairly common in Navajo student writing and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the phenomena relates in some way to Cooley's rhetorical model. In data sample #1 another type of evidence for the connection can be found. This composition was written by a student whose first language was probably English. The writing displays a high degree of conventional usage and standardization. An Anglo orientation is present in the usage of a first paragraph, functioning as an introduction and in the use of a summarizing final paragraph, functioning as a conclusion. These usages contrast with texts produced by most Navajos from the reservation.[2] Still, data sample #1 contains elements of the speech and writing roles discussed above. Between the first and final paragraphs, five individual topics are touched upon. No logical connectives are incorporated by the writer in an attempt to interrelate the topics. Cooley considers the avoidance of connectives on the part of Native American public speakers to be indicative of the speaker's concern for appropriateness in communication roles and responsibil-

ities. Navajo college students likewise, appear to be avoiding the use of connective clauses, phrases and words.

Isolating role requirements from simple lack of organizat'on in written English text is not an easy task. However, the distinction was made for this study according to criteria suggested by Cooley. The presence of two to five topics which somehow relate to a single subject was one indicator. A second factor used to distinguish the two involves a writer's use of repeated material to form an organizational schema. Anglo student writing samples which lack organization follow patterns recognizable as hastily made conclusions or generalizations. Such writing displays what may be termed a broken linear patterning effect. Writing in which the above role requirements function, displays a writer's tendency to shift abruptly from topic to topic. The abruptness is accentuated by the absence of any tracable linear reasoning, well formed or faulty. Data sample #4 provides clear examples of both criteria. Notice how the writer addresses the following four topic areas: 1) lines 1-10 Dennis and dating; 2) lines 11-17 Dennis, jr. high, and sports; 3) lines 18-23 high school; 4) lines 24-29 Dennis and changes. Importantly, no connectives between topics are provided. As well, no

deductive or inductive reasoning patterns are sufficiently evident to support a case for faulty logic.

The second item considered as a possible discourse strategy, concerns text focus. By text focus we mean what the reader's attention is drawn to, or lead to, by means of topic selection. In the data, the writer's use of text focus correlates well with the analyses of Gary Witherspoon (1977) regarding Navajo language and culture. Witherspoon states that the world view held by Navajos incorporates a specific type of duality, such that everything in the universe contains an inner form and an outer form. Neither is considered superior or inferior. The world view may be said to emphasize a complementary individualism. According to Witherspoon, the Navajo sees nothing metaphorically conditioned by this duality. That is to say, inner forms and outer forms are co-equal and literal. Indeed, the way Navajos use focus in written English texts manifests a duality not unlike the one just asserted. In describing how Navajos use focus, we find it convenient to employ the terms directional and implosive. A directional focus is one which moves the attention of the reader in a single direction as if toward a goal. The direction is to be consistent and present throughout the

writing. Implosion occurs if a focus direction moves from objective considerations to subjective considerations, from the viewpoint of the writer. Referring once again to the duality of forms, one may postulate then, that Navajos direct text focus according to outer realities as they relate to inner realities. In contrast to Anglo compositions, practically every sample in the data utilized a text focus which was implosive and directional. In this phenomena, subjective material is most often intensely personal. Movement from objective to subjective occurs along these general lines: first, the focus is on outer physical forms inherent to the subject or important to the narrative event. As the writing progresses, the focus moves or shifts towards one or more internal feeling, experience or event. The movement never involves a shift to the inner forms of outer forms first focused on. Rather, the shift invariably moves from outer forms discussed, to some inner reality the writer experiences. Passage from objective to subjective may be abrupt, as it is in most cases, or it may be gradual. The data contains numerous instances of words that direct the reader's attention inward. Words such as 'remember,' 'think,' 'dream,' are high frequency items in the phenomena. They do not randomly appear,

but are instrumental in direction of text focus. Notice how the data illustrates this. In data sample #3, line 44 and data sample #6, line 27 the word 'remember' is used. By means of its use, the reader's attention is being drawn inward to the internal events in the writer's mind. Likewise, emotions such as happiness or fear are characteristic of an implosive focus. Data sample #6, line 28 and data sample #5, line 39 are examples which involve emotions. Data sample #2 contains an interesting combination of memory, emotion and internal feeling as related by the writer's experiences of eating, sleeping and peaceful relaxation. (lines 55-56) Further, the text strategy of a directional implosive focus is functional even in writing that deals with a subjective kind of subject. Notice how in data sample #3 the writer moves from the topic of family conflict resolving (line 4), to individual sharing (lines 10-11), then onto personal regard (line 18), to a more intense statement of sharing (lines 30-31) and finally to a highly subjective and reflective evaluation of the subject (lines 44-49). The use of this type of focus may not be uniquely Navajo. However, we contend that an implosive directional focus is one which is strongly characteristic in Navajo college student writing.

A third concern in this study's attempt to isolate possible discourse strategies, is that of language influence as it relates to Navajo student selection of verb forms and related English syntactic structures. In the Navajo world view, all matter and being have the dualistic nature described above. A further dualistic distinction of active and static is made. All that exists is seen to be constantly undergoing the processes of transformation, deformation and restoration, a perspective in which the essence of life is movement and in which the static dimension is perceived as the temporary withdrawal of movement. Gladys Reichard (1949) and Harry Hoijer (1964) have written in detail of semantic configurations in the Navajo language's verb stems, indicating that the stems reflect the active versus static distinction. According to these analyses, the notion of static becomes definitive only by means of the active.[3] Unlike most European languages which accentuate nominalization and the segmentation of temporal and spatial reference into specific divisions, the Navajo language strongly emphasizes activity, processes and continuity.[4] To

further emphasize differences one only has to reflect upon the assertion that there are 356, 200 conjugations of the verb 'to go' in Navajo. If the conjugations of 'to move' were added the number would involve millions of forms.[5] Navajo student college compositions are characterized by awkwerd verb usage. As well, constructions that can in any way be associated with verbs present problems. At times students even make modifiers of nouns appear more like verbs. The use of 'holding part' for handle and 'holding hand' instead of a relative clause with a noun (data sample #5) may be compared to Navajo nouns which are basically passive verbs or forms somehow derived from verbs. Likewise, phrases such as, 'to set me up with another to go out with girl,' (data sample #4) may be reflective of concepts better distinguished in Navajo. Adjectives, preopsitions and articles are almost nonexistent in Navajo. The distinctions they represent in English are normally expressed in the complicated system of verbs in conjugation. Like foreign student writing, Navajo student themes are typically scored as lacking appropriate idiom. Implication in the uses of idiom inappropriately, for what

may be tenatively marked interlinguistic phenomena is found in awkward phrases in Navajo English writing. The propositional phrases in data sample #4 lines 4 and 8 are not likely to be simply the result of a student's ignorance of usage or syntax.

Of importance to the Navajo verb system is the idea of unrestricted motion, progressing through space, with only peripheral reference to time. For example, Navajo uses an inceptive form which relates the beginning, the end and the space covered by an action or motion. A progressive continuative system is so closely likened to the inceptive that the resulting feeling is that one carries over into the other. The effect achieved is a kind of gradation of movement according to type. Notice how this is so in the following list of verb forms from Witherspoon:

1) future- he will be moving to a sitting position
2) inceptive progressive- he will start moving toward a sitting position
3) imperfective- he moves to a sitting position
4) progressive- he goes along, moving to a sitting position
5) perfective- he has moved to a sitting position
6) iterative- he moves to a sitting position repeatedly.[7]

Temporal reference exists in Navajo but the language does not divide time as rigidly as does English; instead how something occurs is emphasized. This difference in temporal reference may effect tense selection of English verbs on the part of the Navajo college student. One characteristic of Navajo English college writing is the tendency for seemingly arbitrary changes of verb tense. While present in over half the data, the tendency is particularly in effect in data sample 4. Here, the student changes tense as many as five times per paragraph. Careful examination seems to indicate that this 'inconsistency' does not result from a simple lack of English inflection. The student correctly uses the -ed ending several times in forming the past tense, (played- line 12, started- line 26). Notice also the use of irregular past forms 'kept' and 'went' (lines 15 and 21 respectively). Nonetheless the student also uses some of the same verbs incorrectly in this writing. In particular note the contrasting uses of 'go' (line 16) and 'keep' (line 17). Problems in verb selection on the part of Navajo students may be related to the structures involving passives in Navajo. Witherspoon has shown that the passive as we understand it

does not exist in Navajo. It is interesting to note that in data sample #5, the passive is used only twice. Since this selection particularly lends itself to the use of the passive, in that it discusses rodeo tools and their use, it would seem natural to say, 'Gloves are worn.' or 'Boots are important to..' etc. However, the student relies on constructions which seem awkward and redundant rather than employ the passive. Notice how in lines 6-7 the student uses, 'The glove which you need only one side whichever you hold with,' where a native speaker of Standard English, whatever that may be, would have probably used something like, 'Only one glove is needed for the hand that holds the reins.'

Repetition, as an element unifying text, is a fourth area of investigation in this study. We found it difficult to distinguish any clear cut cohesion devices in the data. Nonetheless, we are inclined to consider text cohesion to be present in light of certain Navajo world view patterns and characteristics. Repetition as a motif, is found throughout all of Navajo life. The viewpoint is held that words, like thoughts, have creative power. In Navajo mythology, things occurred or came into being because someone thought, spoke or sang them into being. In the

belief system associated with this perspective, repetition enhances the compulsive power of ritual song. This repetition, as utilized in ritual, restores what is inadequately translated as harmony (hozhò), that is, everything together which is good, harmonious, orderly and beautiful.[8] The Navajo world view emphasizes harmony, the integration of processes with substance and time, and the creative power of language. At this point, it is not certain that repetition is being employed as a strategy in writing. Nonetheless, it is consonant in light of certain occurences in our data. Word for word repetition is not strongly evident in Navajo college student compositions. However, it is present and therefore interesting. Note in data sample #2, lines 32-34 are repeated in lines 54-55. More significant than such repetition is the occurrence of multiple restatement of one or two central ideas. Notice that in data sample #6 only two primary notions are addressed by the student. Repeated in different ways, these two are the writer's parents in their wish to take their children to the zoo, and the reactions of the writer's brothers and sisters to the experience. Repetition of primary concerns occurs in high frequency in the data, but as yet is left undescribed, requiring further study.

Some Concluding Considerations for Teachers:

While college students from other linguistically different backgrounds may share some of the difficulties of the Navajo, there appear to be much greater linguistic and cultural divergencies between Navajo and English than between the languages and dialects of most non-Native American minorities (such as Black English or Spanish) and Standard English. The most preferable way to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between Navajo and English to date, is in the utilization of a bilingual-multicultural native language approach in teaching.[9] However, until such programs become available to larger numbers of Native American students, college instructors with Navajo students will face current responsibilities and problems associated with teaching the Native American, who is most likely unaware of cultural and linguistic differences as they may affect rhetorical strategy and compositional criteria.

To place the Navajo student in programs designed for foreign students is not only ironic, but is as well an injustice and indignity. However, to ignore special needs and to expect students to compete with native English

Anglos for grades and instructor approval is also unjust. The formation of composition classes, workshops or clinics at the college level for linguistically and culturally diverse American groups presents an interesting possibility. However, it is stipulated that such instruction should be offerred not as substitutes for regular composition classes, but rather as preparation for or supplement to regular coursework. In general, it is important that minority students not be segregated- that their differences not be viewed as deficits. On the contrary, instructors should be so educated that they view diversity as a means by which English discourse may be enriched and enlivened. Such classes, workshops or clinics when formed, should not be organized to 'standardize' writing. Instead they should emphasize cultural and linguistic options in writing in relationship to audience. They should work toward enabling the student to discern and utilize language alternatives and to develop expressive abilities capable of reflecting well each individual's diverse cultural and linguistic identity.

Appendix data samples #1-#6

sample #1

This indident happened on the night of February 16, 1978. It was around midnight; in the midst of the silence; a big explosion was heard throughout the school compound of Pinon where my parents worked. The explosion came from our house, resulting from a leakage in the gas pipes underneath the ground.

The evening of Valentine's day I stayed at my Unele's house in Chinle after a tiresome basketball practice. I had made plans to see two girlfriends at a dance at another school. I missed the bus heading in that direction, so I walked home to my Uncle's.

I watched the shows on television until one-thirty a.m. then went to bed. My Uncle woke me up, saying that my dad had called. My parents and brothers were at the Chinle clinic; having x-rays taken. Luther, my younger brother, had a laceration and slight concussion. Some object had struck him during the explosion. My Uncle and I

arrived in time to see the doctor stitching the cut. Luther went in the ambulance to the Indian Medical Center in Gallop for a forty-eight hour observation. We returned to my Uncle's home to sleep. But we didn't.

The neighbors and a few relatives helped clean and pack our belongings from the house. We transported the furniture to a relative's storage house. She offered us her house to stay as long as we needed. Outside it was cold and snow covered the ground. We lost half of our belongings since they had been frozen to the floor.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the maintenance crew from Chinle investigated the connecting pipes underneath the ground, that accumulated air and burst in our house. The house was old, made of wood and burned easily.

Some Navajos have strong beliefs that when an accident or sickness occurs, witchcraft used by people is the cause. My family went to a medicineman to verify that the explosion was due to witchcraft. The medicineman said it was a warning to us and that there were some

people in Pinon that wanted to get rid of one of my parents. They wanted to find out if we could get back on our feet or just fall apart, when something as drastic as that occurred to us.

The explosion of the house was caused by pipes not welded good enough. The use of witchcraft against my parents enhanced the explosion to occur. At the end we remained a closer knitted family strong and more determined to get back on our feet.

sample #2

On one beautiful Saturday afternoon me and my parents went to the park to have a picnic and enjoy the surroundings. We walked and search for a nice spot to relax and eat. The very first thing I saw while looking around, was a crowd of kids having fun, laughing and screaming at the playground. Some of the boys and girls were swinging on the swings, playing tag with each other, and spinning on the merry-go-round like it was a tornado picking up loose and weightless

ogjects off the ground. Several of boys were playing on the monkey bars resembling monkeys hanging by their tails from a tree. The playground was a noisy location, but the children were really enjoying themselves.

The second activity I saw was ladies, men, and older teenagers playing basketball and tennis. In basketball there were two teams of five competing to see who could reach fifty points first to be the winner. The tennis courts were beside the basketball courts surrounded by fences to keep the balls from rolling too far. On one of the tennis courts I saw a girl tending to her feet and massaging it. She reminded me of when I played basketball and tennis, I got sore feet and blisters from playing to hard. Beside the minor injury, the group of people were getting along fine and having a lot of fun violating the rules of basketball.

Several mellow people were picnicing under tall, beautiful pine trees beside the lake. All the activity going on at the playground, basketball and tennis courts got me all tired

from watching. But I finally found a perfect picnic spot. Here everybody was relaxed and gazed over the landscape and the dark, deep lake. From this point ducks, swans, and jumping fish could be heard and seen. Wow, was it peaceful here! My apetite reminded me of hunger so we had a belly-filling and nourishing meal. Afterwards my yawn caused me to take a nap and breathe in all the clean air and peacefulness. I had a dream about my tasty turkey sandwich I had. I dreamed that the turkey bird was becoming extinct and that there was a shortage of turkey sandwiches. In this dream, I was about to have the last turkey sandwich in the world. When a pine cone hit my chest, I was awakened At this time, it was getting dark and we had to leave for home and too also feast on the last turkey sandwich that was left on the picnic basket.

My, the day was full of various activities at the playground, basketball and tennis courts, but the eating and sleeping made a wonderful, peaceful and relaxing day.

sample #3

My aunt and I had emotional feelings and we had things that were alot in common. Whenever there was a family conflict, she would be there and manage the problem.

I saw my aunt to be and to mean alot to me. Not only for her kindness but for the way she was. When people say something that would hurt her feelings, she would come to me and in return I would do the same.

When I was in the childhood age she would take me along with her, such as on trips or just to go grocery shopping. She always showed me what was good and what was bad. For that I respect her and I am very faithful to her.

Whenever I had a problem I always knew who to turn to. Of course, there was my parents, but they were always too busy. But I learned alot

from my parents too. It almost seems as if my parents taught me the normal usual everyday life, such as to clean or do chores and care for myself, then my aunt taught me to have quiet manners and try to be calm and kind to one and/or another. I know now that I can always talk to her if I have a problem or something is bothering me.

Now that I have gone away from home and to school here at Arizona State University, my aunt has gone up north where she has a home and starting a family

I guess all my childhood experiences were when my aunt was always around. Now they almost are all gone, but when I see her, those feelings will return, The feelings will be what she had taught me eversince I was a small child. All things she had taught me I'll always remember.

Now I think that what my aunt has taught meaning in manners

and kindness thats what I am. And what I can do is what my parents taught me to do.

sample #4

One of my best buddy that I've remember was Dennis. He was a real humorous guy in talking. He also have a good atitude against girls. One time as I remember he try to set me up with another girl to go out with. But he try to talk into her and everything went wrong. And he end up going out with her.

(orig.) up with another to go out with girl

Dennis and I went to the same school in Jr. high. But we played different sport. I was on the football team and he was on the cross country team. This kept us apart at school. In class we go crazy, espeiccelly him. But we always keep our cool.

When we got to the high school he change some of his atitude and friendship but, one thing he didnt change was his cool. I went with him two years in highschool until he went to another school.

In changing his atitude and friendship I lost or he didn't seem to care. He started smoking and drinking with other students that he went to. And went I see him he always welcome me and look ashame.

sample #5

Rodeo equipment has alot of little tools. The main things are the gloves, chaps, hat, Bullrope, and a pair of boots and spurs. These are about what the main things to have when you are going to ride in a rodeo.

The glove which you only need one side whichever you hold with. Gloves are mostly made of any kind of skin from animals. The only kind that are mostly used are the deer skin. They are soft and strong and are

mostly strong leather. They are also the best kind. The reason you wear a glove is when you get thrown from an animal you won't hurt your holding hand.

There is the chaps you can wear to protect your legs. When a Bull goes close to the fench the chaps will protect you from getting hurt. When you fall to the ground any sharp object might be there or pointed that where the chaps come in to prevent you from getting hurt.

You have to wear a hat at all times that is when you are going to ride in a rodeo. If you don't you will lose your chance. So the hat is important in any event.

The Bullrope is the next important thing or piece of equipment to have. It goes around the bull so you hold on with. It's a rope that consists of a holding part with different sizes. Also you have to have it in order to ride if you don't you can't ride at all.

The last important part is the boots and spurs. They are two pieces of spurs which you hook with on the armpit of the bull. You have a pair of spurs that mean it have to go with a pair of boots. The spurs

fit on the back side and a little higher or above the heels. They are tied to the boots so it won't fall off during a ride or the event you are in.

That's about all you have to have when you are riding in the bullriding event. They say it's the most dangerous event in rodeo but after you ride a long time maybe 20 to 50 times, it's not that scary.

sample #6

About three years ago, my parents took my brothers and sisters to a zoo which was in a large city called Albuequerque. At that time, they had a vague idea of the zoo.

I guess my parents took the kids to the zoo, because they wanted them to see all the different kinds of wild animals. My brothers and sisters, themselves were curious about the zoo, until after they found out that, that was where some animals were being kept, like for an exhibit.

From this experience of visiting the zoo was very educational and fun for them.

For example they said they saw some animals they had never seen before in their life. My parents say the kids were just amazed about the animals.

Now that my brothers and sisters are grown up, they talk about what they, what they did then and even go as far as what they fed the animals there.

As I can remember by parents are just happy they had taken them to the zoo.

Notes

[1]Navajo world view is well defined within a philosophical approach by John Ladd (1957). Ladd's views have been recently discussed and adapted to rhetoric by Gerry Philipsen (1972) who addressed many of the ideational bases assumed here. It is of course wrong to consider world view as directly affecting some measurable or monitored writing output. Its status as part of a belief system's structure is however, able to be formulated. That is not of major concern here. Our interest in world view is that it affords being preemptive of cogent comparison.

[2]Data sample #4 is far more typical of Navajo college student composition. Specifically note that first and final paragraphs are not conventionalized. Neither do they structure nor in any way unify the writing.

[3]In specific relation to our comment here, the writings of Reichard and Hoijer are best reviewed by Gary Witherspoon (1977), pp. 48-53.

[4]We are indebted to Mo Káa's 'The logic of non-European linguistic categories,' which aptly details world view contrasts in the use of opposition versus qualification in Algonkian semantic categories.

[5]Witherspoon, 1977, p. 21.

[6]Several excellent readings exemplifying such manifestations are found in Language and Cultural Diversity in American Education, Roger D. Abrahams and Rudolph C. Troike, (eds.). Of specific appropriateness to this topic see articles by Fantini, Young, Gumperz, Troike and Saville.

[7]Witherspoon, p.52.

[8]Witherspoon, p. 23-5 and elsewhere

[9]A report on the Navajo Reservation Rock Point School bilingual program by Lillian Vorih and Paul Rosier (1978) illustrates the type of remarkable results obtained in using this approach.

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